

Gender Matters Interim Update

Wednesday 8 March 2017, International Women's Day: As Screen Australia works towards gender equity in projects receiving production funding, the agency has taken stock on the progress of its [Gender Matters initiative](#). The update comes in the same week that actor and gender equality advocate **Geena Davis** addressed a gathering of the Australian screen industry with a sobering look at the representation of women on screens, highlighting how the issue of unconscious gender bias begins in children's television and film.

"Gender Matters is the biggest initiative Screen Australia has ever taken on," said Screen Australia's Chief Operating Officer **Fiona Cameron**. "It has permeated every corner of our agency, from Program Operations who process every incoming application, to the Development Unit who assess every project and assist talent to develop stories and their careers, to Business & Audience who look after distribution funding for female-led projects under Better Deals."

"Eight months since the Brilliant Stories and Brilliant Careers funding was announced, we're seeing some clear trends emerge including an increase in applications from female led creative teams from 56% to 64% across all our programs. So we are heading in the right direction and we need a couple of years under our belt to influence production outcomes, particularly in the feature film sector where there is a much longer lead time."

"Although I'm confident Gender Matters will reach its target agency wide, the biggest problem area is in feature film production. To that end, we are urging the industry to think about the makeup of their creative team early. If you come in for development or production funding with a project with an all-male team, you will struggle to convince us why that is appropriate in 2017."

An interim update on all five elements of Gender Matters is included below, and a three year rolling statistic tracking gender parity in Screen Australia production funding will be released in the second half of 2017.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA CHANGES

Upon the December 2015 announcement of Gender Matters, an express mention of gender and cultural diversity was added to the Assessment Criteria on all Screen Australia funding guidelines (highlighted in bold):

"Other factors including availability of funds, diversity of slate and **the gender and cultural diversity of the team** may also influence Screen Australia's funding decisions."

Fiona Cameron noted: "Although the Assessment Criteria change may seem minor, in practice it's changed the way we now run our decision meetings. Our staff are looking at every single creative attached to an application, and the team makeup is overtly part of the funding decision. In practice, when we get situations where two applications are comparable in terms of creative rigour, team experience, financial strategy and a path to audience, if one creative team is demonstrably more inclusive, we will fund that project."

BRILLIANT STORIES

In July 2016, \$1.867m in Gender Matters: Brilliant Stories funding was delivered for the development of 45 new female-led projects across television (16), online (11) and film (18). Brilliant Stories represented the most projects Screen Australia has ever funded in a single day in its history.

Fiona Cameron noted: "Projects funded under Brilliant Stories are at a range of stages from script workshops to shooting pilot episodes. Many have already attracted distribution partners, international finance and co-production opportunities."

"The speed at which many of the Brilliant Stories projects are progressing is encouraging. The success of this initiative has also prompted us to look at ways to assist female creatives beyond Gender Matters, such as [Doco180 with WHIMN](#) and the [ABC ME 'Girls' initiative](#), both announced this week."

Corrie Chen (director/writer) and Penelope Chai (writer) received Brilliant Stories funding for the development of their feature *Strangers* (formerly titled *Arrivals*). The story follows a young Australian woman

who travels to a city in China to track down her long-absent father, but all she finds is a desolate metropolis with a single inhabitant awaiting the arrival of others.

Based on the real phenomena of ‘ghost cities’ in China, the creative team utilised part of their Gender Matters funds to do on-the-ground research, enabling substantial reference footage to be shot. A first draft script is due in mid-2017.

Corrie Chen noted; “The Gender Matters initiative has been particularly empowering for us and our project because of its commitment to being more open and receptive than traditional funding rounds. This was important because, at application, our project was still in its infancy and we didn’t yet have a firm grasp over its tone and scale. With the support of Screen Australia, it allowed us to put our development funds towards our research trip.”

“As writers, this trip was crucial for authenticity as it’s a story about two people from different cultures being thrown together. As a director, it allowed me to finesse a strong voice over the film I want to make, and how I could capture the extraordinary world of China’s ‘ghost’ cities. As a woman of colour, this opportunity and the faith of Screen Australia has really accelerated my career, and helped me find the confidence to realise my voice is of worth.”

Whilst it is normal for projects to spend years in development, several projects have already reached significant milestones:

- **Public Relations** (television) will shortly deliver their polished first draft, and just released their concept video.
- **Silver Lining** (television) has been workshopped with Alice Bell (*Puberty Blues*) and [Academy Award® nominee Luke Davies](#) (*Lion*) has been attached as a script consult.
- **Tales From Outer Suburbia** (television) has already produced two incarnations of the pitch bible that were presented at Kidscreen (February 2017).
- **Torn** (television) has delivered a pilot script and budget, with Amanda Higgs joining as a consultant as the series prepares for the next phase of development.
- **All Our Eggs** (online) has completed scripts and will shortly shoot a proof of concept.
- **News Junkies** (online) has developed a pilot script and is working towards shooting a proof of concept.
- **Sheilas** (online) has already delivered a pilot episode with Nikki Britton and Kate Box (*Little Death, Rake*) in the cast. The pilot will be used as a proof of concept.
- **Triple OH!** (online) has benefited from a story workshop in December 2016 and the ability to bring on contributors including Chloe Rickard (*Here Come The Habibs*) and Sarah Bishop (*Skit Box*).
- **The Virgin Intervention** (online) has developed a pilot and a broadcaster has expressed interest for further development.
- **Baby Cat** (film) utilised funds to host a workshop with LA-based story consultant Bobette Buster and a second draft has been delivered.
- **Bondi Beach Breakfast Club** (film) has benefited from a script workshop with two other female writers. A polished first draft will be delivered shortly.
- **Cloud Money** (film) have travelled to France to meet with potential co-production partners and a script editor has been funded to assist to deliver the first draft.
- **The Last Flight** (film) will soon deliver a second draft script and director Unjoo Moon utilised funds to meet with some of the real life Pan Am stewardesses on whom the film is based.
- **Relic** (film) has delivered a first draft.
- **Ride Like A Girl** (film) delivered their first draft script in February 2017 and the project is being tracked by several sales agents.
- **Runaway** (film), which is tonally resonant with the Screen Australia-funded short film, *Trespass*, was able to use Gender Matters funding to do a site visit to Canada with the intention of pursuing a co-production arrangement. A table read was held in January 2017 with executive producers Jan Chapman and Jane Campion, as well as David Michôd (*Animal Kingdom*), who is coming on board as a script consultant.

BRILLIANT CAREERS

Concurrent to Brilliant Stories, \$1.882m was awarded in Gender Matters: Brilliant Careers funding for 13 business proposals to tangibly grow careers and create work opportunities for female screen makers.

“I have been incredibly impressed by how quickly the Brilliant Careers recipients have translated their concepts into training and jobs,” said **Fiona Cameron**. “The Australian Directors’ Guild has already placed shadow directors onto *Home & Away* and *Love Child* with ten more placements to come. The Goodship Agency has hired a Brand Integration Specialist, Sales Agent LevelK has hired an intern, Mamamia have hired an Executive Producer, and Flickchicks are recruiting for a writer/director and producer right now. All these placements and jobs will in turn deliver their own opportunities for other women in the screen industry.”

“We’ve seen with our Enterprise program how investing in business ideas can create a whole ecosystem of opportunities for screen talent, and Brilliant Careers is already showing signs of having the same result.”

Hardy White Pictures has already put their Brilliant Career funds to work with **Erin White** noting, “Thanks to Gender Matters, we’ve been given a chance to roll out our business plan much earlier than we could ever have imagined. At the end of 2016 we were able to attend the Screen Forever conference where we made some really valuable contacts and received local and international feedback on our slate of projects; and in 2017 we will spend four months developing our slate full-time.”

Michelle Hardy added, “The chance to be able to work full-time on our fledgling business is absolutely essential to ensuring our success. Gender Matters has given us a once in a lifetime opportunity to fast-track the future of our company.”

Nearly all Brilliant Careers recipients are already active, including:

- **Australian Directors’ Guild**, which received 44 applications for the Shadow Directing initiative in TV drama and 34 applications for the Commercial & Content Directing Mentorship. Between both programs 20 women will get direct work placements. The recipients of the Commercial & Content Directing Mentorship will be announced 14 March, 2017.
- **Closer Productions** has quickly used its funding to develop feature *Graceless* written by Nicki Bloom, television series *Black Dog* written by Jessica Redenbach, and feature documentary *Kids* from the acclaimed writer/director of *Gayby Baby*, Maya Newell. Closer Productions will also start to provide seed funding to writers and/or directors, from which it will select at least two works for further development.
- **Smart for a Girl: ROAR** from Endemol Shine Australia received an incredible 935 applications for the 12 career-starting opportunities to work with Imogen Banks and Alice Bell. The successful applications will be announced March 2017.
- **Flickchicks** are currently interviewing applicants for a TV factual director/writer and producer, with the announcement of the two successful candidates expected in the coming weeks.
- **The Goodship Agency** hired Anna MacDonald as Brand Integration Specialist to kick-start their new business of securing brand partnerships with a slate of screen products. The innovative business leverages the power of commercial brands to support a screen work.
- **LevelK** hired Debra Liang as a paid international sales and distribution intern, and have already provided Debra with work on both the Gothenburg and Berlin International Film Festivals. The placement has been so successful LevelK is endeavouring to expand the role for Debra.
- **Mamamia.com.au** hired Briony Benjamin as Executive Producer to develop the site’s video capabilities. Mamamia will focus on offering assistance to all Brilliant Stories interactive and online recipients to plan their path to audience.
- **The Natalie Miller Fellowship** has already utilised funds to stage the Leadership Program conference for 170 female screen professionals (selected from over 400 applicants) in February 2017. The organisation is now assessing applications from attendees to select 56 women who will benefit from the Mentor Program, which will provide a minimum of 4 x 1 hour sessions with a professional mentor at no cost.
- **Northern Rivers Screenworks** received 50 applications for The Athena Project, a 2 day intensive workshop held in November 2016 for 12 female screen professionals from regional areas all across Australia. Screenworks leveraged the success of the workshop to obtain an additional \$5,500 in development funding for each participant from their relevant state agency. The workshop was preceded by a half day forum, which was subsequently made available online for free. The forum included invaluable advice from Gillian Armstrong, Grainne Brunson (Head of Strategy and Industry Development

Screen NSW), Tracey Vieira (CEO Screen Queensland), Annabelle Sheehan (CEO South Australia Film Corporation) and Monica Davidson (Author, Lecturer, CEO Creative Plus Business Group).

Mandy Lake of Flickchicks said of the company's Brilliant Careers funding; "This financial 'leg up' is bound to have quite the butterfly effect: it's not only an investment in the Flickchicks' business and our personal careers, but also in those of two mid-career female filmmakers who we will now hire. We also very much wanting to pay it forward beyond this funding by positioning ourselves as mentors and incubators of emerging or fledgling female talent in Queensland. Be sure to watch this space!"

Samantha Lang, President of **The Australian Directors' Guild** noted; "Thanks to Gender Matters, by the end of 2017 the ADG will have successfully championed at least 10 emerging female directors to gain credits both in television and TVCs. This is a tangible and significant outcome in addressing the underrepresentation of women directors in our sector."

ATTACHMENTS FOR WOMEN

Announced at Melbourne International Film Festival 37° South in 2016, Attachments for Women made it compulsory for any drama receiving \$500,000 or more in production funding from Screen Australia to have a paid female attachment built into the budget.

Since this was put in place, four attachments have begun:

1. Charlotte McConaghy: script editor on the ABC medical drama *Pulse* in NSW.
2. Sheree Philips: production designer on the Network Ten miniseries *Wake in Fright* shooting in Sydney and Broken Hill, NSW.
3. Mel Sawyer: producer's assistant on the Spierig brothers' new horror feature *Winchester* shooting in Victoria and San Jose (USA).
4. Sarah Freeman: production assistant on the ABC Me teen comedy drama *Mighty Mustangs* shooting in Victoria.

A placement on SBS drama series *Sunshine* will commence in March 2017.

To date, the value of the confirmed attachments amounts to \$300,000. The Attachments for Women fund has a total pool of \$1m available (\$700,000 remaining).

Another 10 attachments are slated to commence this calendar year.

BETTER DEALS

\$1m over two years has been allocated towards the Better Deals pilot program, to incentivise distributors considering female driven film projects. Screen Australia will match the distributor's minimum guarantee of up to \$300,000 as a contribution to the project's theatrical marketing campaign. The matched funding is not automatic and each application will be assessed against the criteria.

The first successful applicant for Better Deals has been notified, with a public announcement expected within weeks.

NEXT STEPS

The target for Gender Matters is for at least half of titles receiving production funding to be from female-led teams by the end of 2018.

Screen Australia's funding cycles follow financial years, so 2016/17 will be the first full 12 month period since all of Gender Matters has been in effect. As such, a full update will be released in the second half of 2017.